Iwata Asks

Iwata Asks is a series of interviews conducted by former Nintendo Global President **Satoru Iwata** with key creators behind the making of Nintendo games and hardware.

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Nintendo 3DS

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Shigeru MIyamoto

Satoru Iwata

The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D Mr. Shigeru Miyamoto

Ganon's Castle as the Only Setting?

Miyamoto

(sitting down) Am I the only one today?

Iwata

Yes, today it's just you.

Miyamoto

Oh. I have no idea what everyone else said, though.

Iwata

You're busy preparing for E3[1], so you couldn't find time to participate together. As we go along, I will tell you what the original developers said in your absence. Thank you for coming.

Miyamoto

No problem.

1. E3 (Electronic Entertainment Expo): A video game trade show usually held once a year in Los Angeles. In 2011, E3 was held for three days starting June 7.

Iwata

Today I'd like to look back with you at The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time. The development period for it was far longer than for other games at the time and the release date got pushed back more than once.

Miyamoto

The original plan was to release Super Mario 64[2] simultaneously with the Nintendo 64 system and to bring out The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time[3] the following year for Christmas.

Iwata

It was scheduled to go on sale at the end of 1997.

Miyamoto

Yes. So it was almost one year late.

2. Super Mario 64™: The first 3D action game in the Super Mario Bros.™ series. Released simultaneously with the Nintendo 64™ system in June 1996.

3. The Legend of Zelda™: Ocarina of Time™: An action-adventure game released for the Nintendo 64 system in November 1998.

Iwata

Development took about two and a half years. It must have been terribly hard on the developers, but they all said it was fun!

Miyamoto

Oh, they said that?

Iwata

Yes. They even said "All right!" when the release was delayed! (laughs)

Miyamoto

Really? (laughs)

Iwata

Everyone talked about it so happily that I wondered if over the last 13 years they've simply forgotten all the hardship. (laughs)

Miyamoto

(laughs)

Iwata

How was it for you?

Miyamoto

It wasn't hard for me either. Developers generally like it when the deadline gets pushed back anyway.

Iwata

Everyone did say, "Now we can polish that up!" and "Now we can fix that one spot better!" when we got the extension.

Miyamoto

Right. Up until the very end, we were saying, "This needs more work and that needs more work."

Iwata

I hate to say it, but if the development period goes on an extra year, it can't all be fun.

Miyamoto

You're right about that! (laughs)

Iwata

But everyone says it was fun.

Miyamoto

Yeah. Well, maybe it's like asking, "Are you happy when the date of a test gets put off one week?"

Iwata

Ah, I see. (laughs) Because when it comes to studying for a test, you can never study enough.

Miyamoto

That's right. You may think, "I'm happy I can study more," or you may think, "Now I have to study next week." But if you've got the energy to keep studying hard, you're happy the exam got pushed back. (laughs)

Iwata

How did you view the project when that long development spanning two and a half years began? Everyone was just plunging ahead into unknown territory, right?

Miyamoto

That's right. Back then, no one knew which direction the overall game industry was heading.

Iwata

That's true now, too. (laughs)

Miyamoto

I suppose so. (laughs) But back then, for example, if you had a big three-billion-yen project, no one knew if it would end up costing five billion, or two billion.

Iwata

Yes, you couldn't see ahead back then. I wonder how we ever managed! (laughs)

Miyamoto

No kidding! (laughs) The only person who knew was the person who budgets the scheduled projects. But that person can't guarantee anything when it comes to how fun the game is.

Iwata

Uh-huh.

Miyamoto

So Ocarina of Time was one of the very first of such games, I mean, it was a huge project of making game in 3D polygon without knowing the final outcome from the beginning.

Iwata

It was bigger in scale than anything you had previously experienced.

Miyamoto

I did, though, have experience building up games one by one.

Iwata

You had made game after game since even before the Famicom system.

Miyamoto

And aside from me, (Toshio) Iwawaki-san and (Kazuaki) Morita-san at SRD[4] had built up programming experience making 3D graphics for Super Mario 64 and other games. And I think (Yoshiaki) Koizumi-san and those guys had a rough idea of how they wanted to make The Legend of Zelda in 3D based on their experience developing Super Mario 64.

Iwata

Yes, that's right.

4. SRD Co., Ltd.: A company established in 1979 that contracts to develop video game software programs and develops and sells CAD packages. The head office is in Osaka, and their Kyoto office is inside the Nintendo head office.

Miyamoto

But no one knew how big in scale it would become.

Iwata

Even you didn't know how big it would be, but began working on it.

Miyamoto

Yes. And I am not talking about budget or development period that I just touched on, but because the memory size we could use with the Nintendo 64 system was fixed, I was not able to tell how vast a game could be developed within that capacity.

Iwata

Back then, the limits of the hardware weren't that high, so you could only do so much.

Miyamoto

Right. So rather than start by determining a story, we started by making the system.

Iwata

That's how you always do things. I remember you saying you couldn't make a Zelda game until you had become familiar with the new hardware.

Miyamoto

Yes, I said that. I had already made Super Mario 64 and Star Fox 64[5] for the Nintendo 64 system, so I had built up a certain degree of know-how.

5. Star Fox 64™: A 3D shooting game released for the Nintendo 64 system in April 1997.

Iwata

Like the proprietary camera system and real-time movies.

Miyamoto

Right. And we had to make something big, but with limited memory. So, for example, suppose certain data were structured into an "ABC" set, "ACD" set and "ADF" set. When each set exists independently, you can read them all at once, but...

Iwata

With each of them independent, they take up a lot of memory space.

Miyamoto

Right. So I would have "A" stay there all the time and the other data switch in and out. If you only change what you have to, the memory is more efficient and the data reads more quickly. In other words, you make good use of the characteristics of the ROM.

We put constructing the system first, and since we were going to determine the story in line with the system's capacity, at first I thought only having Ganon's Castle might be enough.

Iwata

Huh? At first you imagined Ganon's Castle as the only setting?

Miyamoto

Yes. I thought about putting in all kinds of adventures into the different rooms, like making a dark meadow or an ocean—like in Princess Peach's Castle in Super Mario 64.

Iwata

You imagined lots of rooms in Ganon's Castle, with various worlds all connected.

Miyamoto

Yes. In the worst case, Link wouldn't have been able to go outside the castle! (laughs)

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